

Firm offers vision for DuSable Park

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Plan charts land
near Navy Pier as
tribute to settler

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Park proposal

An engineering team has unveiled its design for DuSable Park, a 3.2-acre land parcel located near Navy Pier.

By Patrick Rucker
Tribune staff reporter

A park dedicated to Jean Baptiste Point DuSable will be converted from a small, idle lakefront plot into a proud attraction with open spaces and tributes to its namesake settler, according to plans made public this week.

On Wednesday evening, a Loop civil engineering firm presented its vision to develop the 3.2-acre DuSable Park at the mouth of the Chicago River near Navy Pier.

The plans call for a park dominated by a large, grassy lakeside lawn ringed by a wooded area dotted with installations that pay tribute to DuSable—Chicago's first non-Native American settler.

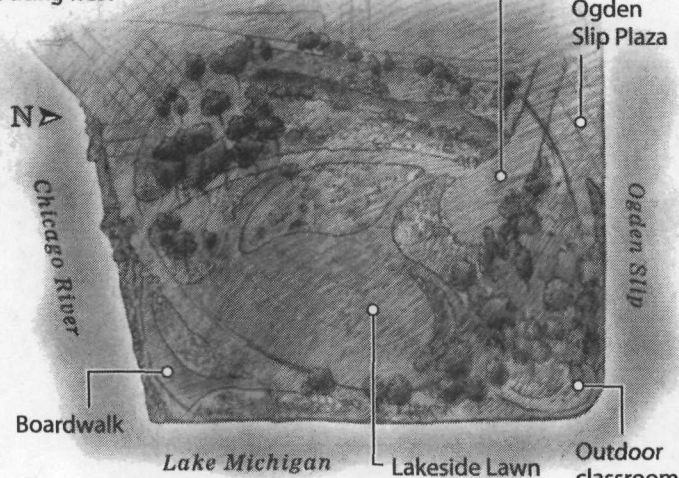
"I've worked on a lot of park projects, and this is truly phenomenal," said Bob O'Neill, Grant Park Advisory Council president and a member of the district's DuSable Park steering committee.

A footpath around the site will wind past an outdoor classroom, a small wetland area and a boardwalk that stretches out toward a lower-seawall.

A site named Founder's Plaza will sit in the center of the park and may have a sculpture tribute to DuSable. The Art Institute of Chicago has commissioned Martin Puryear, an abstract artist who once lived and worked in Chicago, to do the sculpture.

Designers aimed to evoke Chicago's history as a crossroads for travel and its unique natural characteristics.

DUSABLE PARK PLAN Facing west



Source: Chicago Park District

The wooded area will be dominated by native plant species like hackberry and white oak trees, which supporters hope will attract some of the millions of migratory birds that annually fly over the area. The wetland area is meant to be a reminder that the mouth of the Chicago River was once a thick marsh.

Early outlines for the plan call for it to be completed by the fall of 2006. But Thursday, Park District officials said that they had no firm timetable on when the project will be started or finished.

Still, they said that the plans presented Wednesday were likely to hold as the development moves ahead.

"We do not anticipate any

drastic changes from here on," Park District spokeswoman Michele Jones said.

That news will come as a disappointment to many downtown dog owners who had hoped the plans for the park would include a dedicated space for their pets. The Streeterville Dog Club had been organizing a petition to have the plot designated as an oasis for urban dogs.

"If dogs can be accommodated, that's great. But it is not going to be a dog park," O'Neill said.

In 1987, Mayor Harold Washington created DuSable Park on the peninsula jutting northeast of Lake Shore Drive and the Chicago River. But it served mostly as a dumping

ground for waste soil and a plot often eyed by developers.

In recent years, groups such as the Friends of DuSable have pushed for the site to be improved to serve as a fitting tribute to the black fur trader who set up a trading post in Chicago in the 18th Century.

In December, Kudrna & Associates was awarded a Park District contract to spend nearly \$250,000 to survey the site and determine what kinds of improvements could be made on a \$9 million budget. In the last several months, the firm has studied the site and what is required to shore up the retaining walls and make other improvements. Planners also contemplated new landscaping, lighting and footpaths around the area.

O'Neill said he expects DuSable Park to complement the other lakeshore developments and that he hopes it will be paid for through the kinds of public-private partnerships that supported Millennium Park.

"We get a much better, more interesting park through this kind of financing partnership," O'Neill said. "Millennium Park has set a precedent and shown that nature and culture can come together in a downtown park."

Haroon Rashid, president and founder of Friends of DuSable and a member of the park's steering committee, said he is happy that the plans aim to create a scene that DuSable might recognize.

Rashid said he expects the park will "bring a flashback of what the area used to look like, what the river was like. . . . Hopefully, it will be a place where people can rest and reflect on how things were."

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